

**“Don't spare me Shankar”**

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**





# “Don't Spare Me Shankar”



*Jawaharlal Nehru*



An Exhibition Of  
Original Cartoons On Jawaharlal Nehru By Shankar

Organised by Government of India, Cabinet Secretariat,  
Implementation Committee for the Jawaharlal Nehru Centenary  
and Children's Book Trust



# “Don’t Spare Me Shankar”

Quoted above are the words which prompted Shankar to make Jawaharlal Nehru—his personality, actions, thoughts, and policies—the central theme of over a thousand cartoons that he drew in *Shankar’s Weekly* between 1948 and 1964. Perhaps no other statesman in the world has figured in so many cartoons drawn by one cartoonist. That perhaps can be the rod to measure the rapport which the two of them had with each other. An exhibition of a choice collection of over four hundred of these cartoons will befit the occasion when the nation remembers that great son of India on his birth centenary. The cartoons, in their original form, are being exhibited at the national level for the first time ever. Except for the lamination given to them, the cartoons are just as they were drawn and prepared for block-making. No re-touching has been done for the sake of the exhibition.



# Nehru and Shankar

They were the best of friends. While Shankar had a great admiration for Nehru, and regarded him as his philosopher and guide, Panditji showered on him not only his affection but some indulgence, too. Shankar's cartoons in *The Hindustan Times* from 1932—all of them lampooning the British rulers and their regime—had caught the attention of the Indian leaders fighting for the freedom of the nation. Jawaharlal Nehru was one of them, and he readily accepted a request from *The Hindustan Times* to write a Foreword to a small collection of Shankar's cartoons that the newspaper was bringing out in 1937. The Foreword is reproduced on the facing page.

Two years later, in 1939, the two of them met for the first time in Geneva, where Shankar went from London on learning that Nehru had joined his ailing wife, Kamala. They were instantly drawn to each other, and Shankar cemented this friendship when Nehru visited London soon after their meeting.

When Shankar, after leaving *The Hindustan Times*, was ready to launch his cartoon journal, *Shankar's Weekly*, he could not think of anyone other than the Prime Minister to release the first issue in the third week of May 1948. Having seen Shankar not sparing the high and mighty in the British regime, Nehru had only one advice to give Shankar at the public ceremony: "Don't spare me (and my government)."

And did he? The cartoons on view speak for themselves.



# Foreword

How many of us have waited from day to day for Shankar's cartoons? How many of us have turned to the page of The Hindustan Times containing his cartoon before we have seen the news of the day? That cartoon has not only given us pleasure but a new insight into current events. For a true cartoonist is not just a maker of fun but one who sees the inner significance of an event and by a few master strokes impresses it on others. Shankar has that rare gift, rarer in India than elsewhere, and without the least bit of malice or ill-will he points out, with an artist's skill, the weaknesses and foibles of those who display themselves on the public stage. That is a service to all of us for which we should be grateful. For, we are apt to grow pompous and self-centered, and it is good to have the veil of our conceit torn occasionally. And so I gladly pay my tribute to Shankar and I hope that he will long continue to enlighten us and amuse us and pull us down a peg or two.

Allahabad  
February 24, 1937

Jawaharlal Nehru

*Foreword to a collection of Shankar's cartoons published by The Hindustan Times*



# The Man of the Week

*After the inaugural number of Shankar's Weekly, formally released by Jawaharlal Nehru, the next regular issue of May 30, 1948 had the Prime Minister as "Man of the Week" Between then and the issue dated May 30, 1964 in which Panditji was written about as "Man of the Era", Nehru was "Man of the Week" on more than twenty occasions. The exhibition features five of these caricatures along with brief sketches*

Jawaharlal Nehru must have been naughty as a boy—obstinate, perplexed, chivalrous and cheerful. He has not changed. If he were not a political leader or Prime Minister, he would have discovered India more, written more books and gathered good royalties. If he were not writing books, he would have kept himself busy swiping flies and catching butterflies. At 17, York Road, there is no lack of either flies or butterflies. They come in endless succession, from morning till late in the night.

The more he swipes the flies, the more they come to trouble him. The smile changes into a frown, the chin stands out more dauntlessly; he looks perplexed and thoughtful. But he asks the world to hit him hard because he is still the naughty boy who can take it. And it is safe to hit him hard because he never hits back.

Jawaharlal is not true to type. His smiles and frowns are not typical. Politicians think he is too honest to be one of them.

On the verge of sixty he is the boy of Harrow, dreaming of great things for his country. It does not matter to him that his dreams may be unreal. He keeps his freshness of heart—the dauntless boy, intent on his butterflies, willing to be cheated but incapable of cheating.

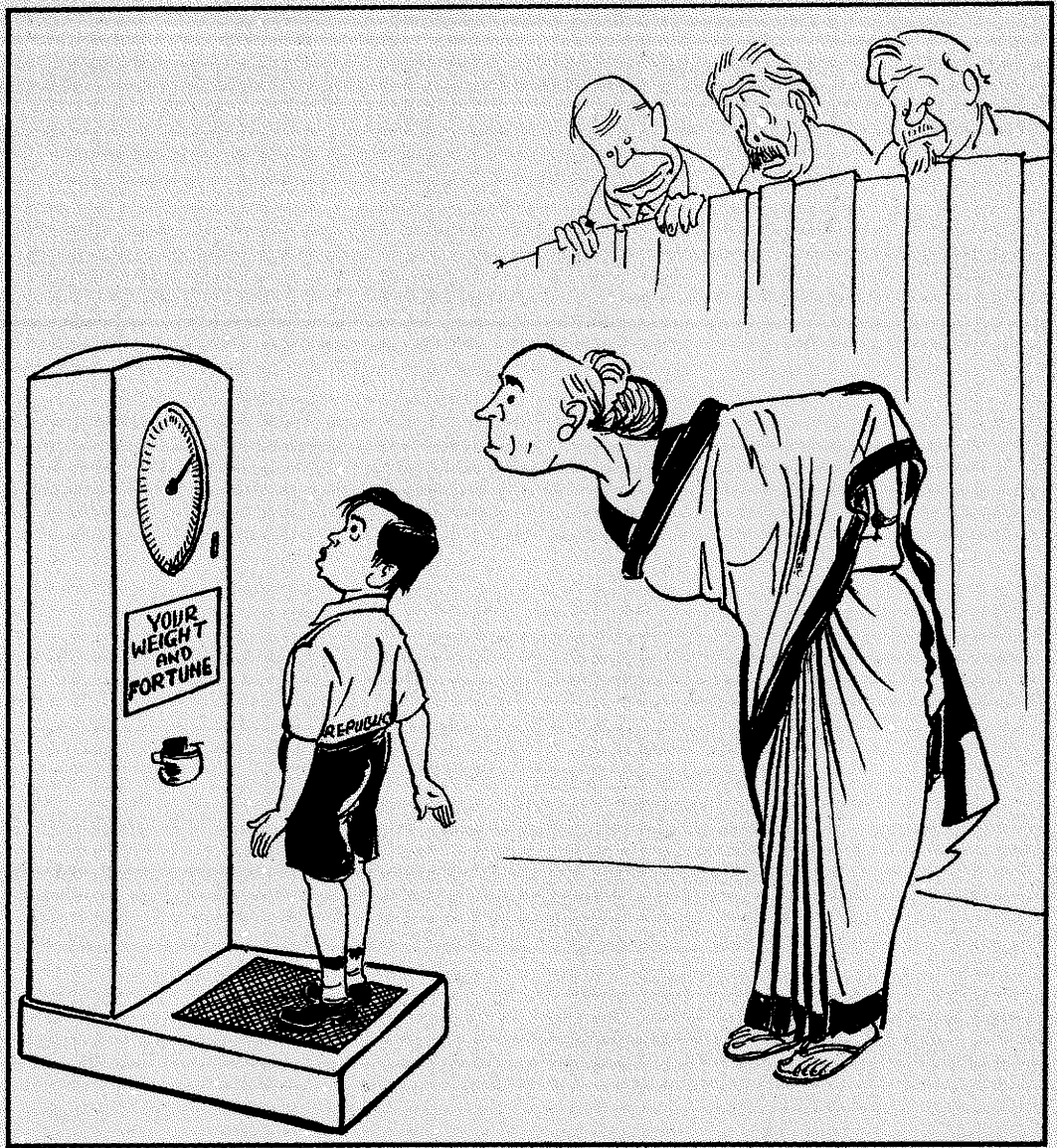
May 30, 1948





January 26, 1958

Nehru—the Prime Minister  
*Nehru studying progress and prospects of the growing Indian Republic*  
*The peeping Toms are Eisenhower (USA), Macmillan (UK) and Bulganin (USSR)*



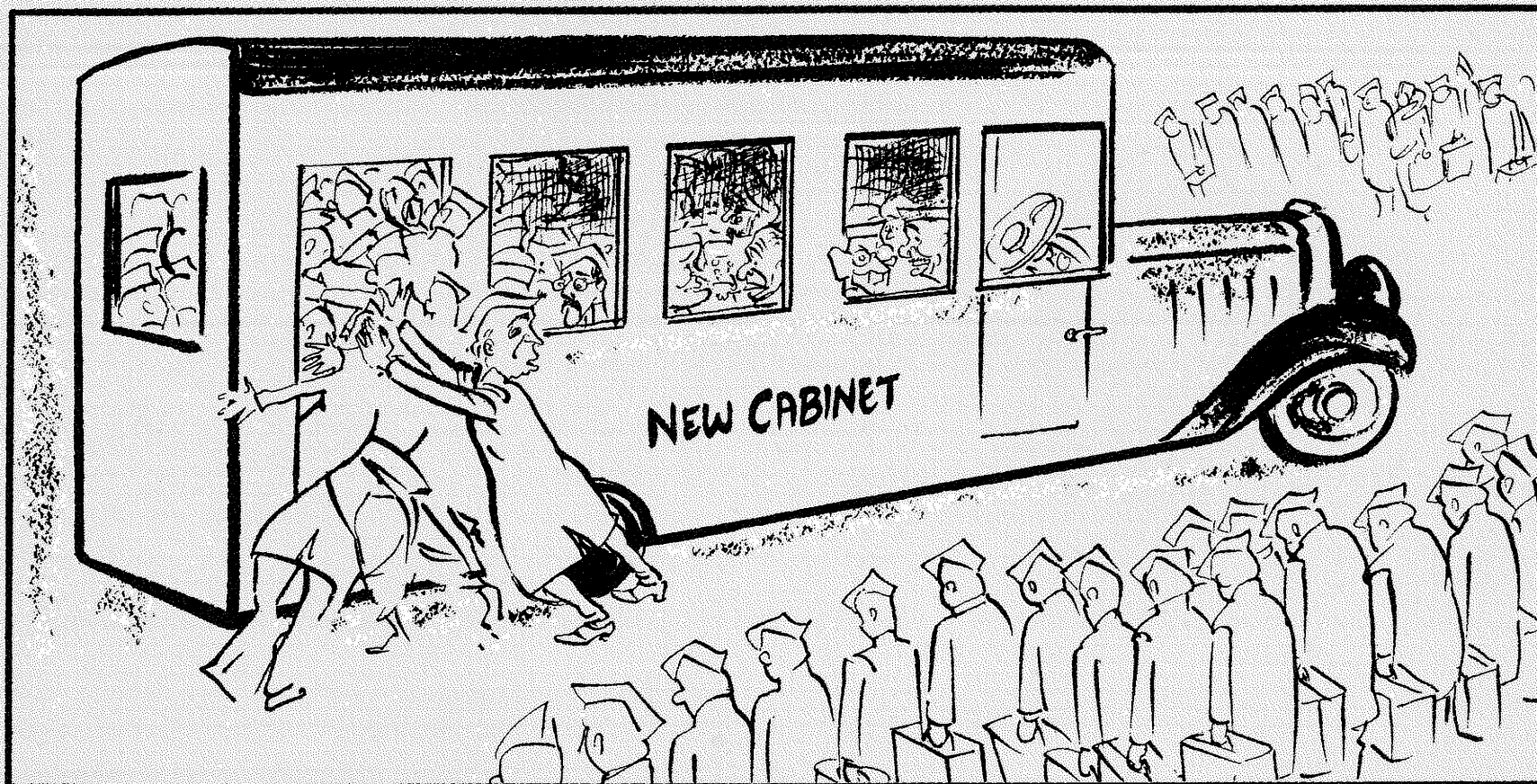


August 28, 1949



Nehru and Constitution—making

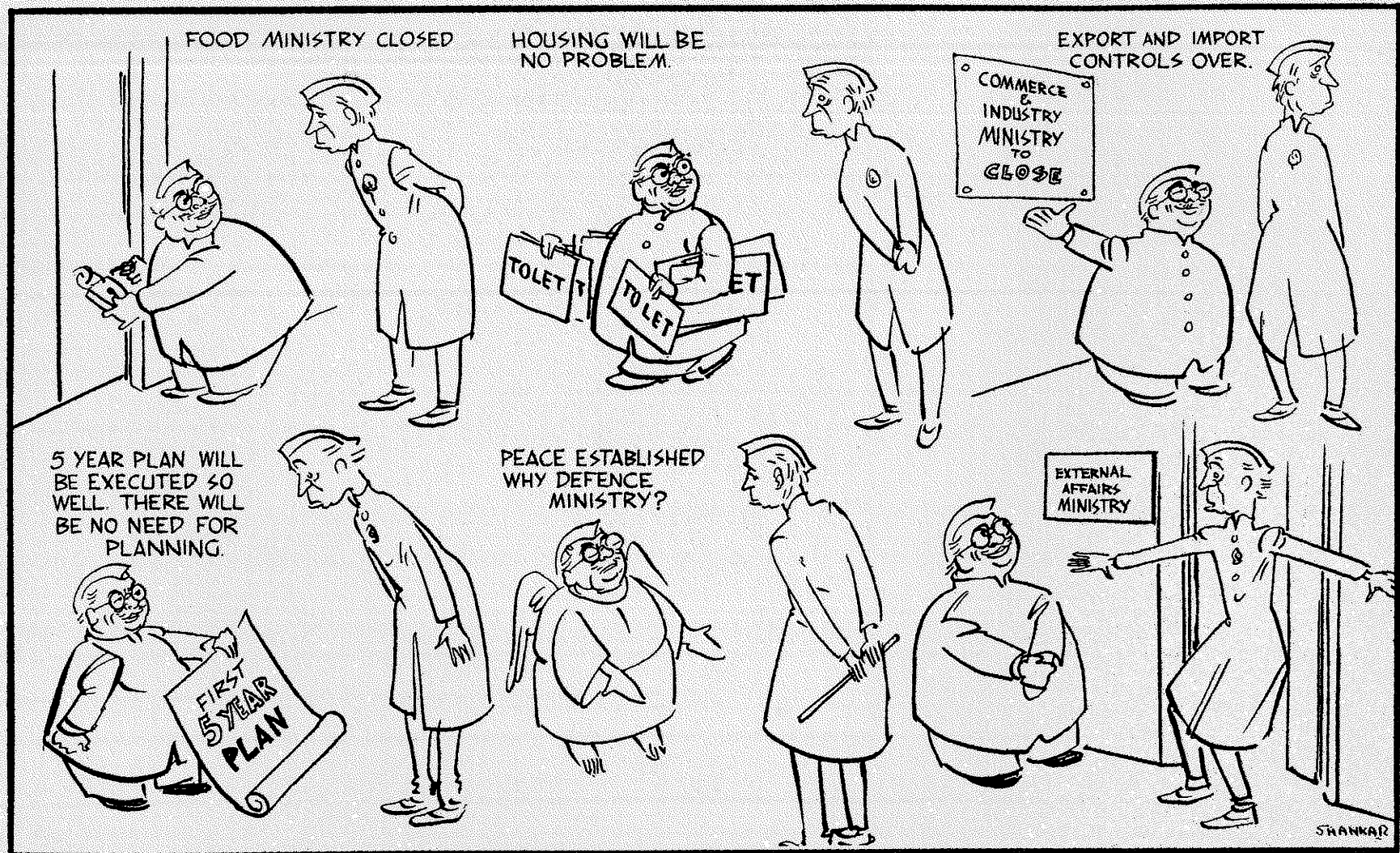
*Ambedkar was chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee*



ANYONE LEFT OUT?

*Seen at the windows are G.L. Nanda, S K Patil Krishna Menon, Morarji Desai, and Lal Bahadur Shastri.*

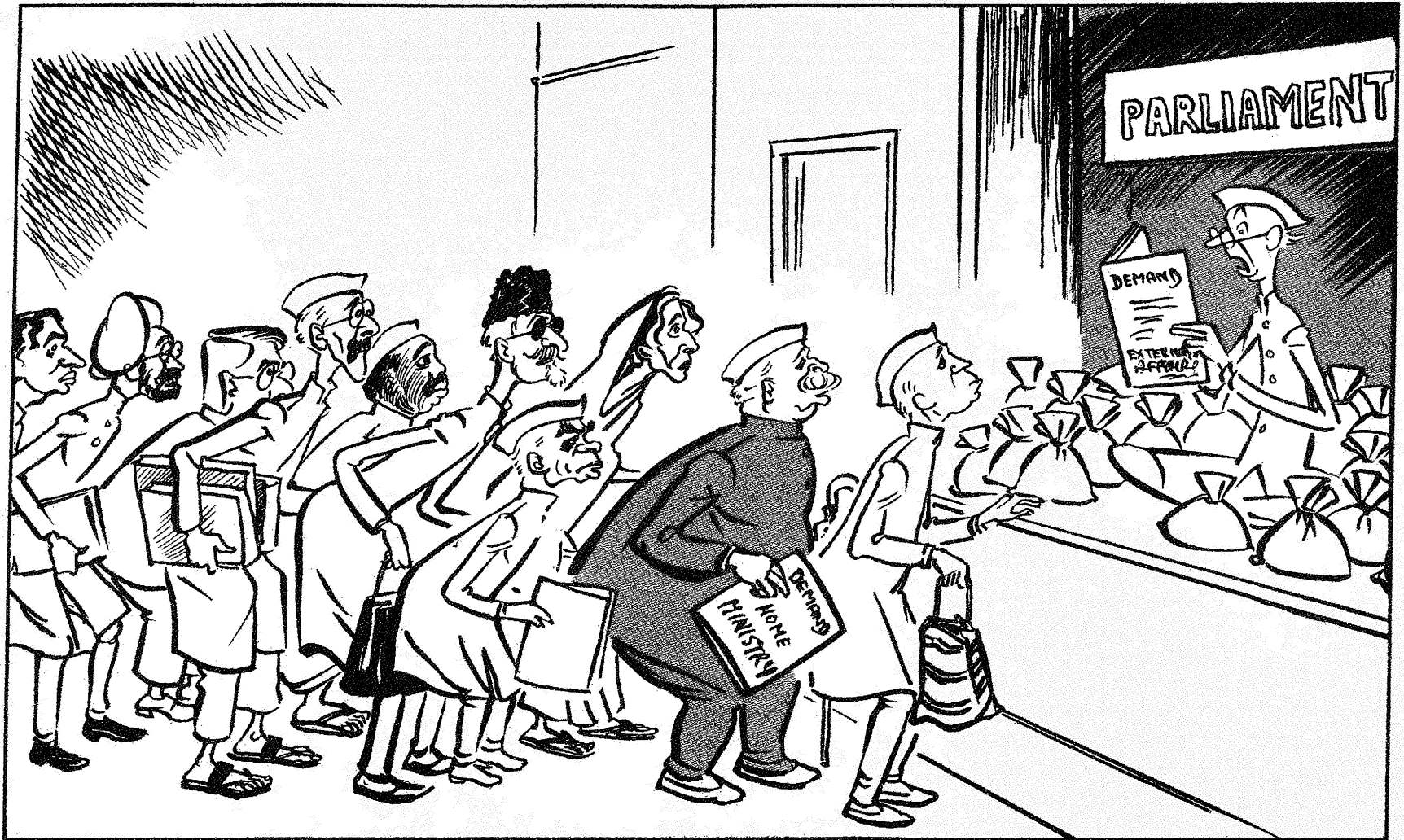




### MINISTER FOR WINDING-UP

Speculation is rife about the future of Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai.

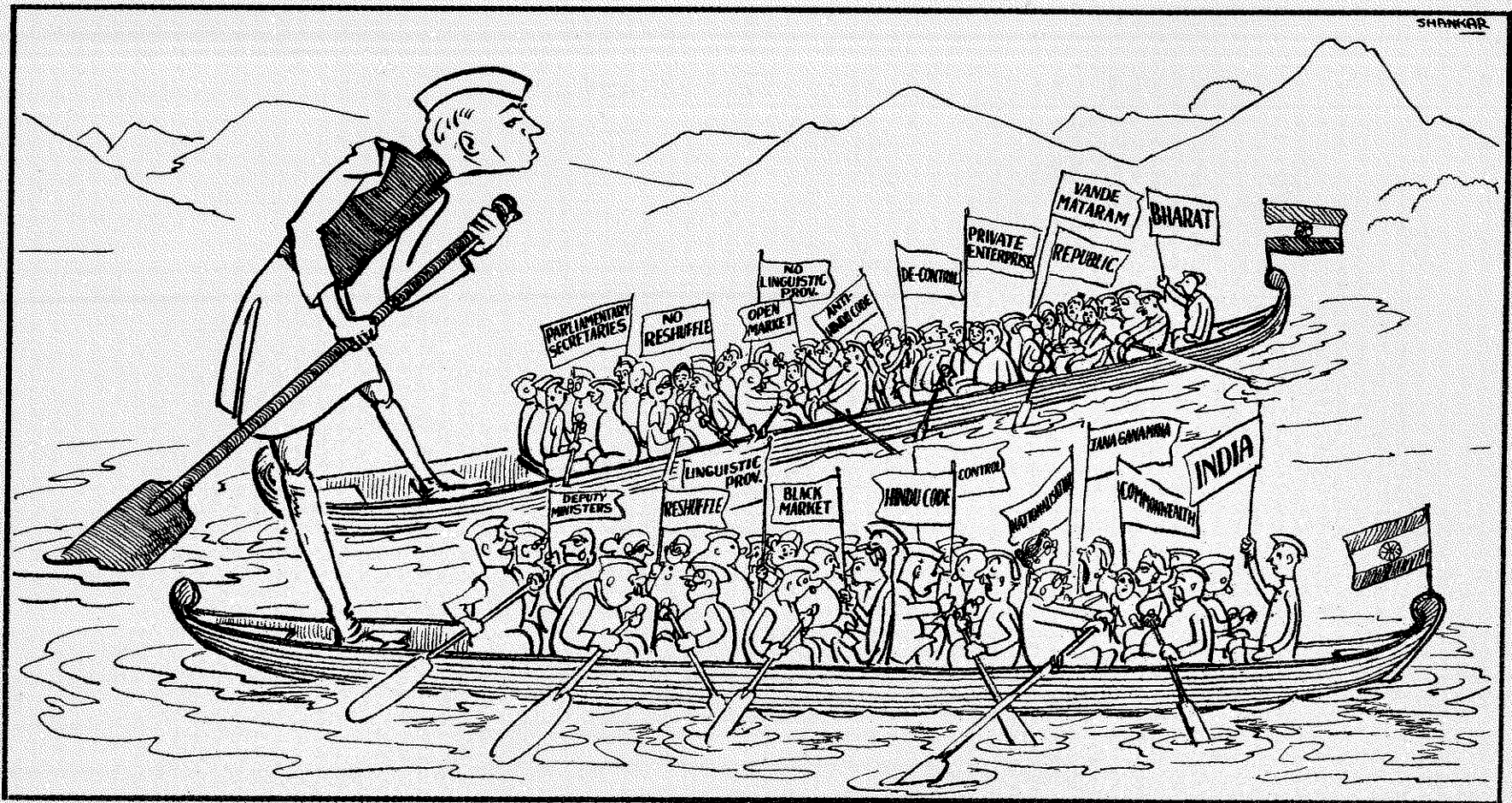




### QUEUING FOR RATIONS

Parliament is now considering the budget demands for grants of the several Union Ministers.

*Behind Nehru, are the Central Ministers Govind Ballabh Pant, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Kailash Nath Katju, Maulana Azad, Jagjwan Ram, Gulzari Lal Nanda, T T Krishnamachari, Swaran Singh, and Chintaman Deshmukh.*



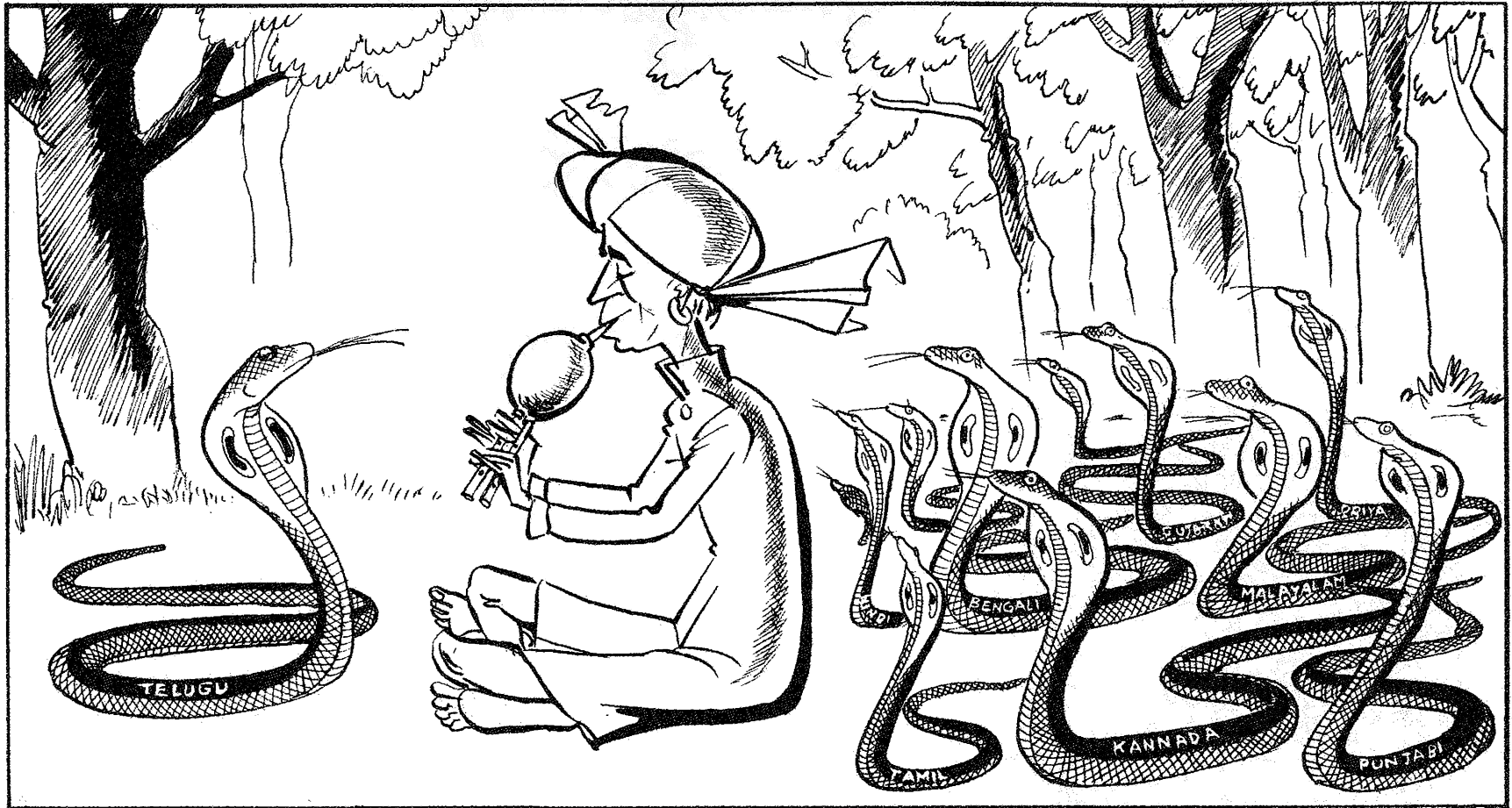
INDIA THAT IS BHARAT



## BUYING TROUBLE

Asked for his views on the agitation for Vishalandhra, Nehru said that the psychology behind the demand was expansionism.





### THE CHARMER AND THE CHARMED

Nehru stated at a public meeting that he was not opposed to the idea of linguistic states.

August 5, 1956



### Nehru and Regional Issues

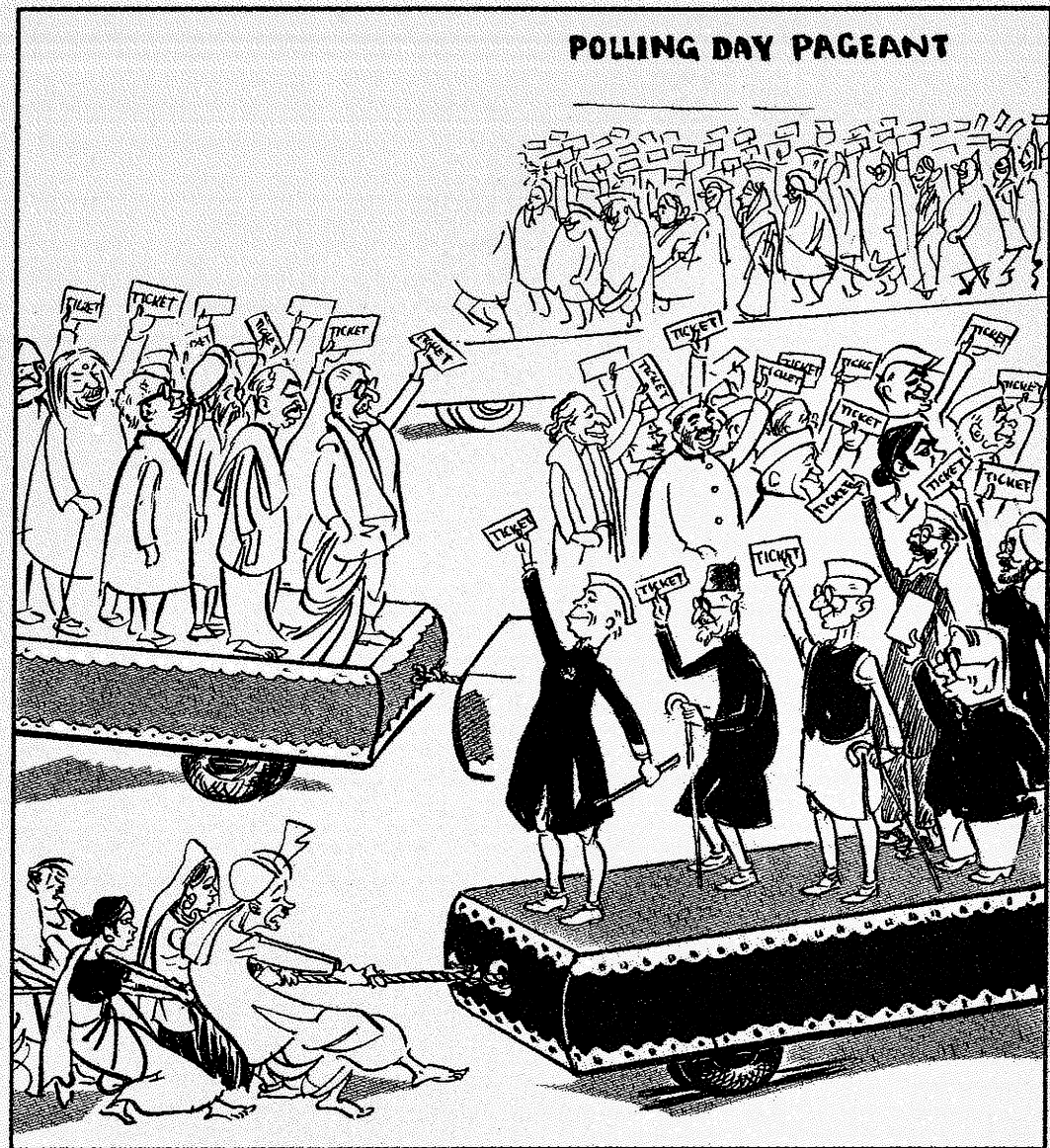
*Chintaman Deshmukh, who was opposed to the proposals on Bombay, cuts the rope which S.K. Patil has climbed. Beating the drum is Govind Ballabh Pant*

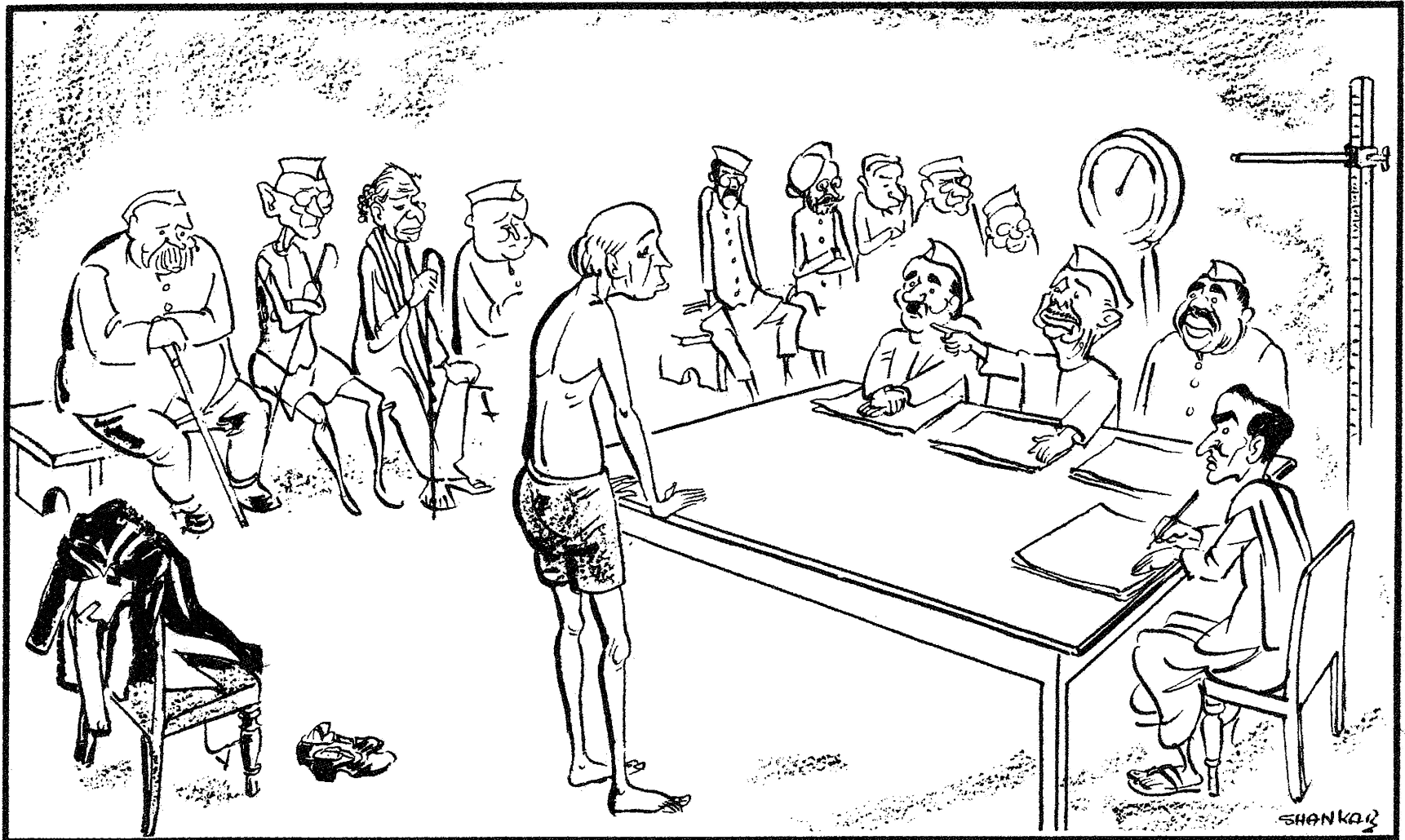


January 26, 1957

Nehru's Three Elections  
REPUBLIC DAY

*In the pageant are ticket-holders for  
the 1957 elections*





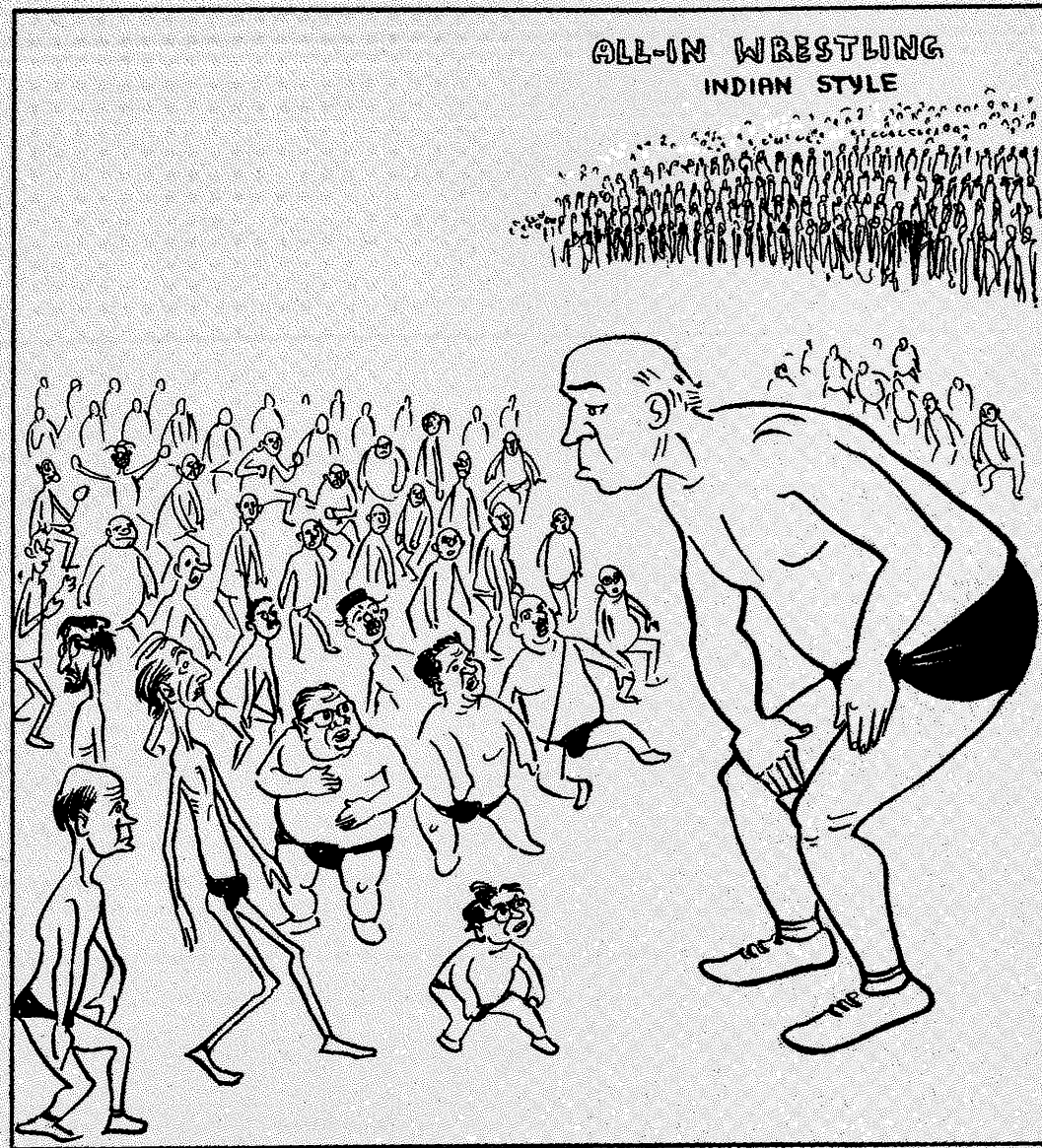
### THE RECRUITING OFFICE

The standards for the Congress candidates for the General Elections have been set down—Report.

*At the table are Sanjiva Reddy, Jagjivan Ram, Lal Bahadur Shastri and U.N. Dhebar, while waiting for their turn are Pant, Morarji Desai, Krishna Menon, S.K. Patil, Nanda and Swaran Singh among others.*



February 10, 1957



### Nehru and the Opposition

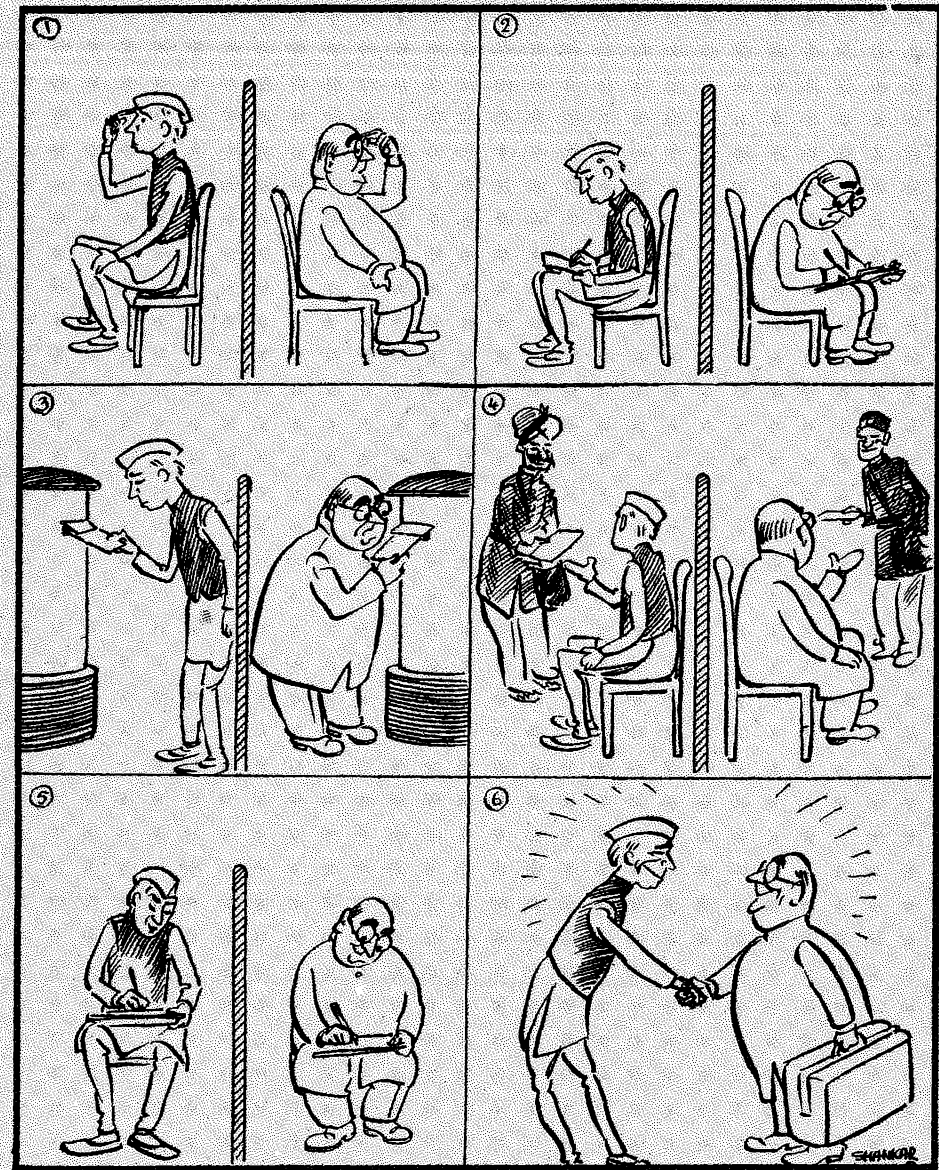
*Nehru all set to wrestle with the opposition leaders at election time. Among others can be seen Kripalani, Asok Mehta, A.K. Gopalan, S.P. Mukherjee, and S.A. Dange.*

April 2, 1950

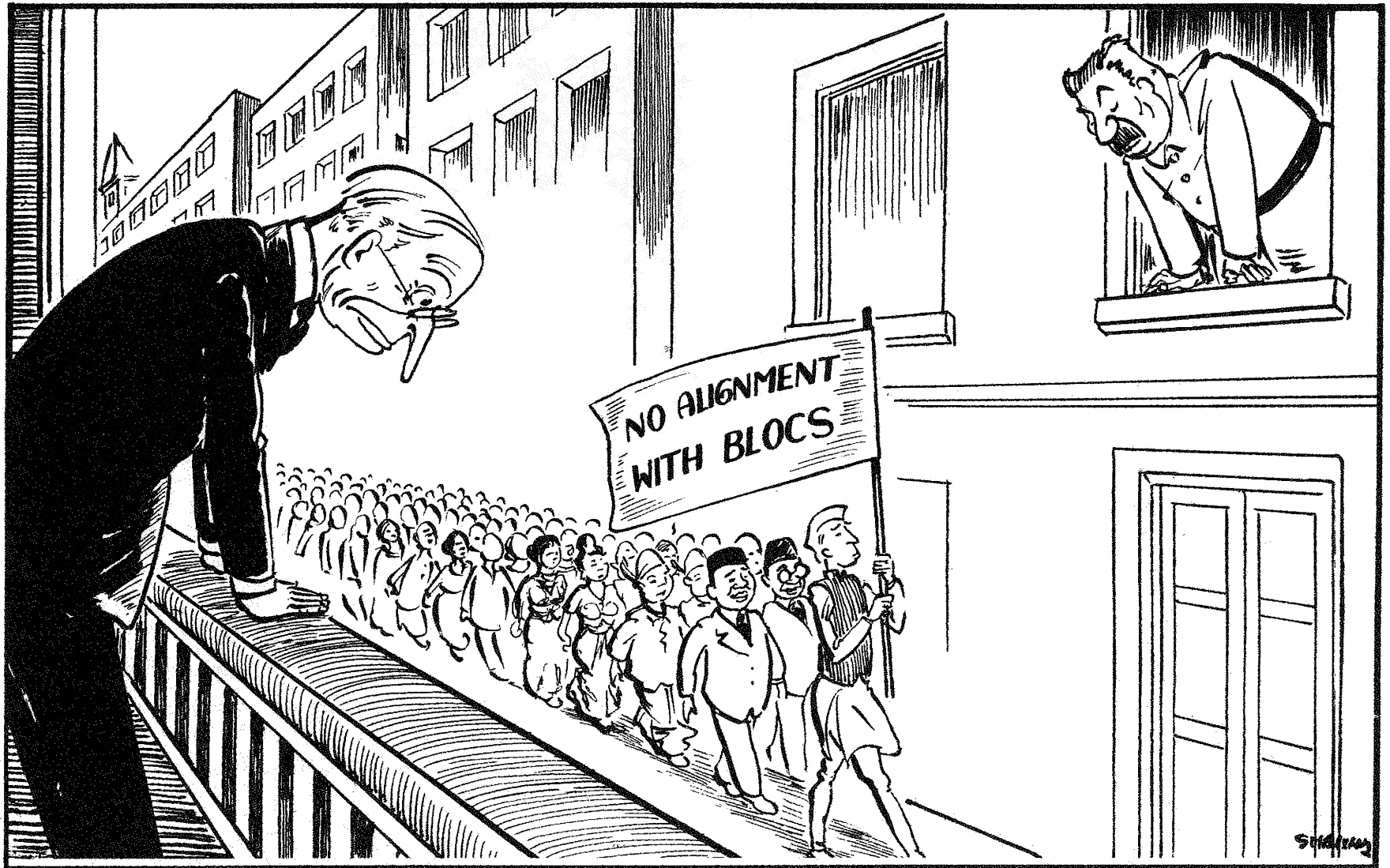
## Nehru and India's Neighbours

### JOINT ACTION

*Exchange of correspondence with the  
Pakistan Prime Minister, Liaquat  
Ali Khan.*

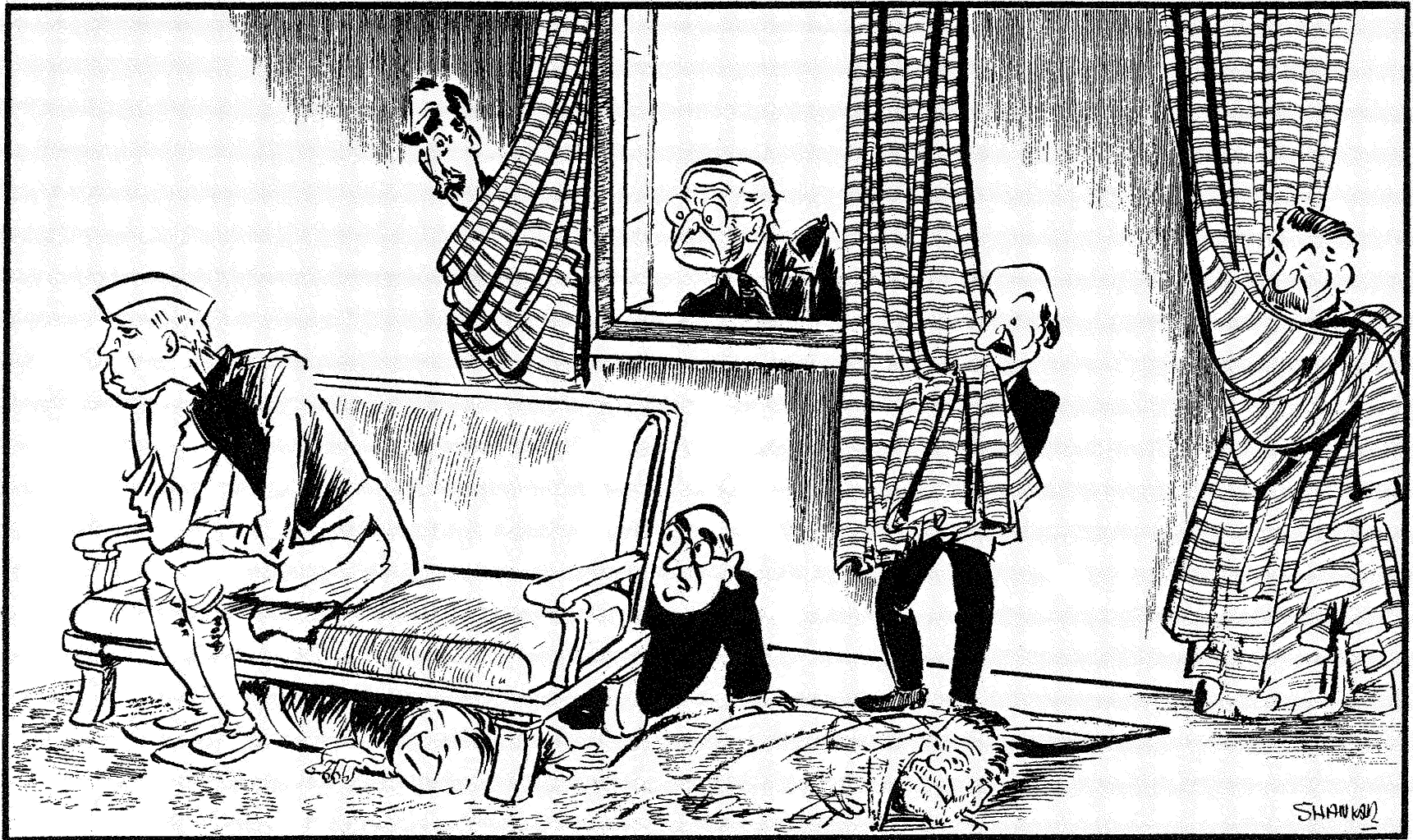






"...DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA"

*Nehru leading the non-aligned movement, as Truman (left) and Stalin (right) watch with concern.*

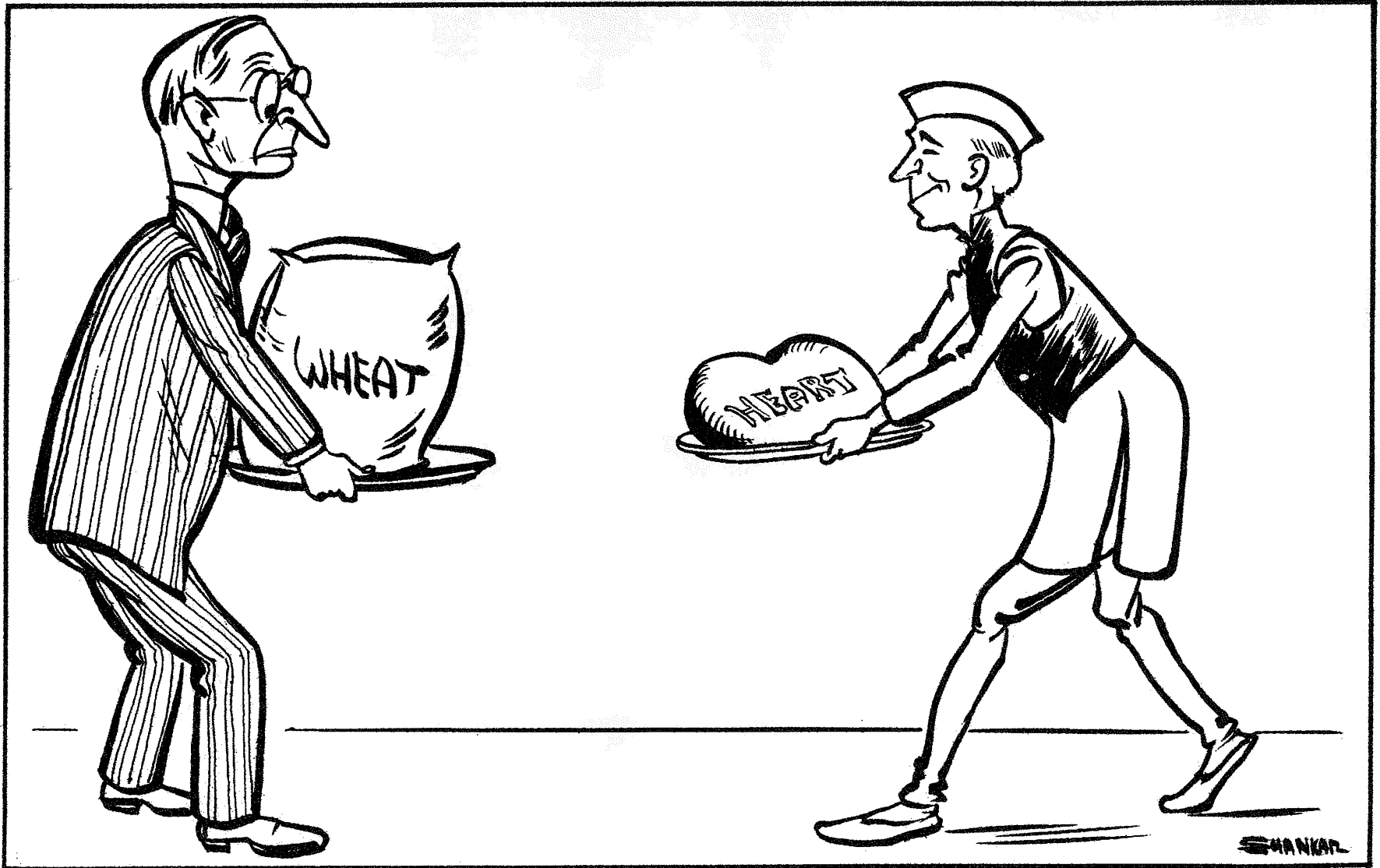


### WATCH FOR THE NEXT MOVE

That Pandit Nehru has sent secret notes to foreign powers has been frequently reported in the Press of late.

*The world leaders shown here include Stalin, Attlee, Truman, Liaquat Ali Khan, and Chou En-Lai.*





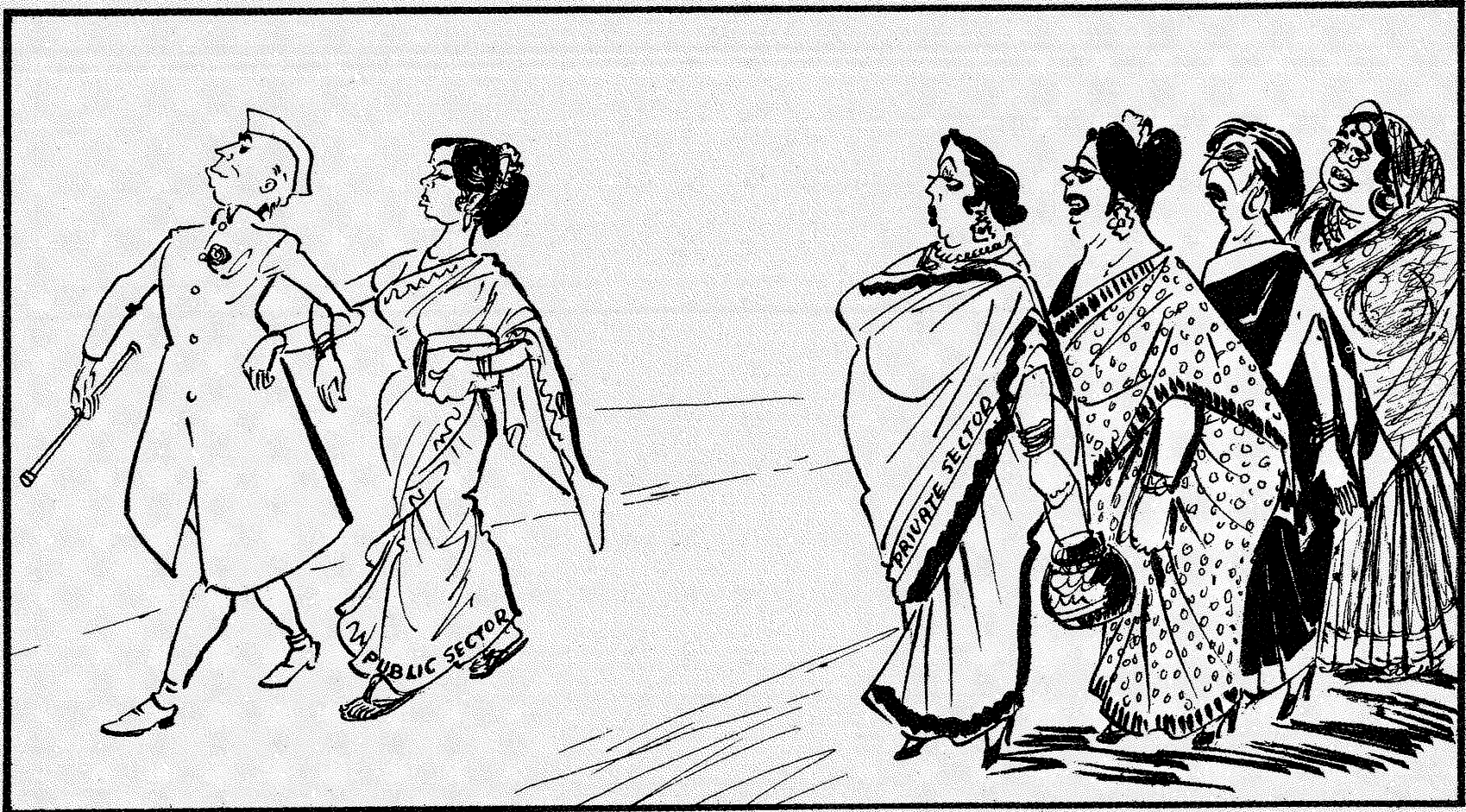
*Making a gift of wheat is US President Truman.*

March 1, 1953



Nehru and Planning





## PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

The public sector in India is today infinitely superior to the private sector—Nehru.

July 21, 1957

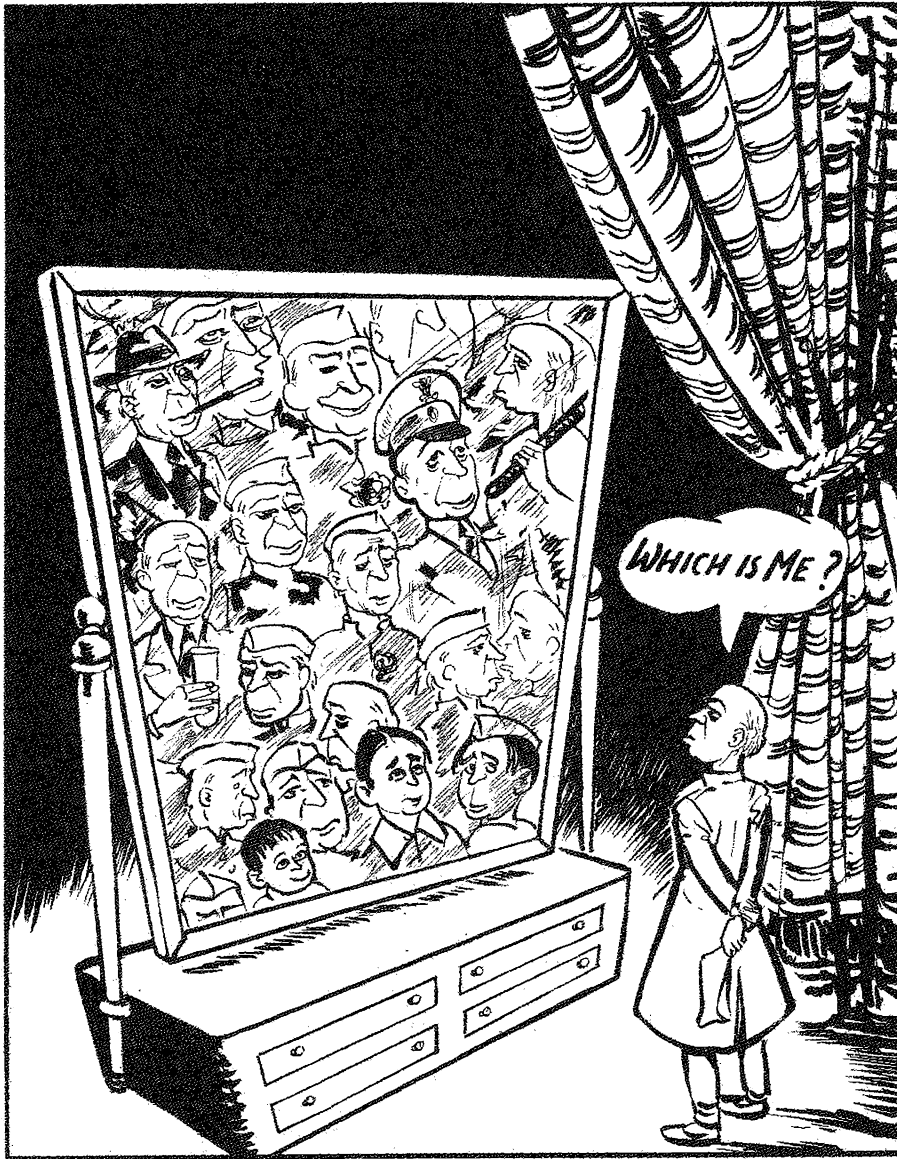


### Nehru's Visits Abroad

*Greeting Nehru on his return from abroad are his Cabinet Ministers Krishnamachari, G.B. Pant, Lal Bahadur Shastri, G.L. Nanda, Maulana Azad, Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram, Swaran Singh, Ajit Prasad Jain, and S.K. Patil.*

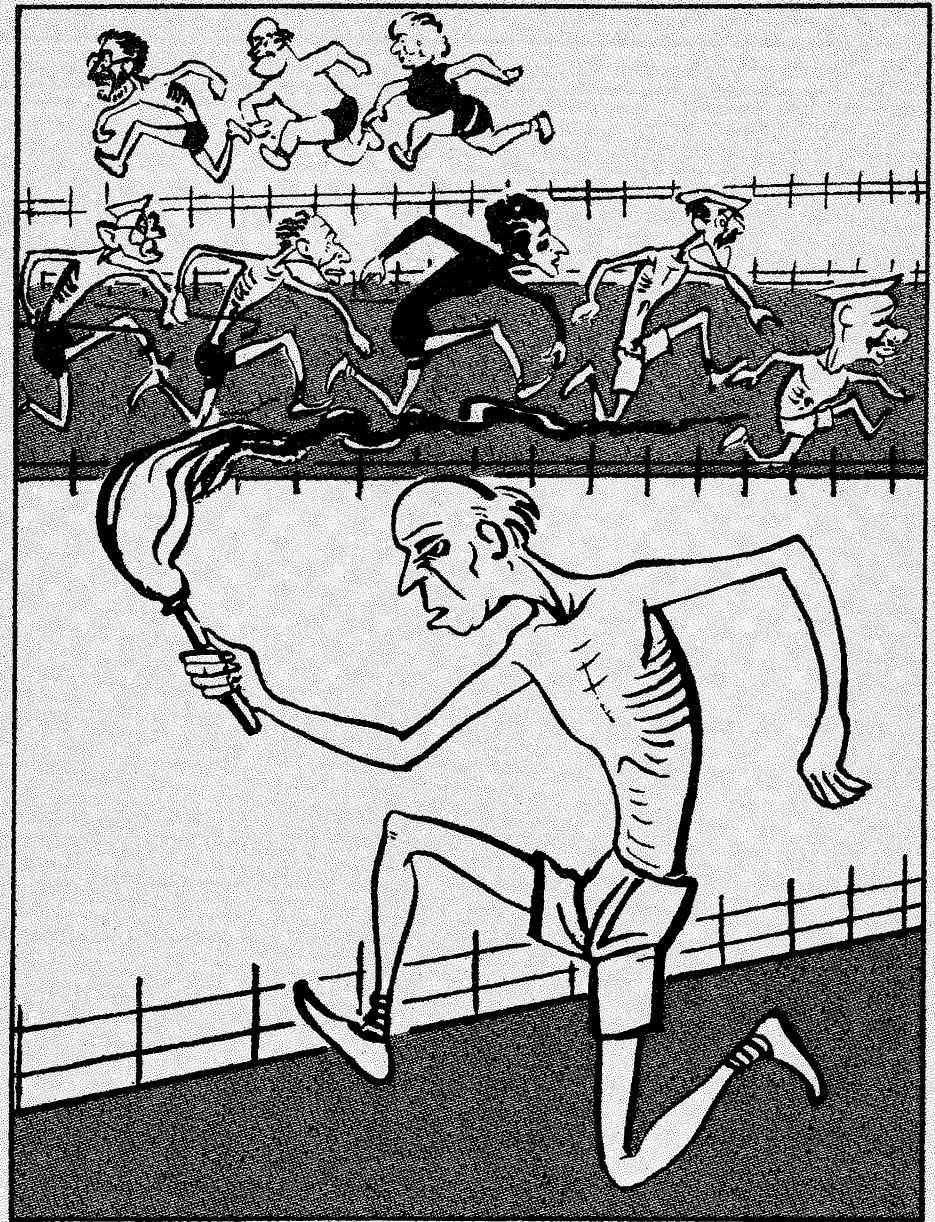


October 24, 1954



Nehru: Many Men in One

May 17, 1964



### Who After Nehru?

*One of Shankar's last cartoons of Nehru, who passed away on May 27, 1964. A prophetic cartoon. Behind him. Lal Bahadur Shastri, Gulzari Lal Nanda, Indira Gandhi, Krishna Menon and Morarji Desai.*



# The Nehru Era: As Seen Through Shankar's Eyes

A Commentary By A.K. Damodaran

## **Nehru—the Prime Minister**

Shankar's amused comments on Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister begin in 1948 and end almost with the passing of an era in 1964. The Prime Minister and the people are the primary theme. Then come his explorations of the future in search of India's destiny. There were failures, dilemmas, moments of excited achievement. Always at the back of his mind were the hopes, the destiny of his beloved country.

## **Nehru and Constitution-making**

The first years after transfer of power were preoccupied with the travails of partition which come before Shankar began to chronicle the Nehru years. Then came the challenge and the comedy of the Constitution making. Dr. Ambedkar, Gopalaswamy Iyengar, Sardar Patel, and

Maulana Azad are important. The central problem was the reconciliation between the divergent parts and the whole. It was, in a manner, sorted out to most people's satisfaction. But as Shankar notes, there were always queries.

## **Nehru and his Cabinet**

Shankar is, perhaps, most creative in depicting with good humour the various personalities of Nehru's colleagues, not all of them happy with his ways or views, but having no choice. They were big men, most of them, and Shankar loves drawing them—Sardar Patel, Dr. B. C. Roy, T. T. Krishnamachari, Azad, Iyengar, Dr. John Matthai, Kidwai and Deshmukh. Many of them passed from the scene, and men like Krishna Menon, Keshav Dev Malaviya, and Morarji Desai replaced them. It is always a hilarious circle.

## **Nehru and Successive Governments**

At the beginning the Constituent Assembly met and Rajen Babu was the dominant figure. Then came his long tenure as President, with Dr. Radhakrishnan flitting through Shankar's cartoons, an elegant, civilized fixture. There were also attempts to enlarge the administration by bringing in J. P. and the Socialists. At the very beginning, there were non-Congress experts like John Matthai and Shanmugham Chetty. Shankar notes with wry amusement Nehru's incapacity to make meaningful changes. The Party was too strong.

## **Nehru and the Parliament**

From the very beginning, Jawaharlal Nehru had a vocal, effective opposition in Parliament. Kripalani, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, N. C. Chatterjee and, during later years, Masani and Lohia, forced him to defend his policies on socialism, on the linguistic provinces and on some aspects of foreign policy. It was spirited fighting, but in good spirits. All great fun! Partisanship was the norm. We sometimes forget this today, because of his dominant place in history.

## **Nehru and the Nation**

It was a continuous quest, both for the nation and its leader, a search for prosperity, security, and a reasonable stability at home. The worries of the young republic were primarily internal. There were dark forces of superstition and revivalism everywhere, vested interests, threatened by the new dispensation, were angrily fighting back. Some of the greatest of Shankar's cartoons deal with these nightmarish horrors. In the midst of it all is Nehru, the perpetual optimist, the kind nurse and guardian of the country's yet vulnerable liberties.

## **Nehru and the States**

The relations between the Centre and the States is the stuff of all federal politics. Nehru was an expert on this. For decades he had worked in the Congress and made it into a truly national organisation. In his India, the States were mostly run by his own party, but the leaders were men of stature and in all major national issues, dialogue, discussion, harmony and discord were inevitable. Shankar delights in depicting them through the countenances of the great men in New Delhi and the State capitals—members of a confused orchestra with some lovely notes conducted by a benevolent and indefinitely tolerant dictator. The issues become personalised inevitably in the world of the cartoonist. There is, however, no crude over-simplification here. It is a delicate dialogue between men who understand each other.

## **Nehru and States Reorganisation**

Even before the Constitution was framed, language and linguistic provinces dominated the debate and Shankar is at his best in projecting this deep division in the minds of both the politician and the ordinary citizen. The decision to form the Andhra state is viewed with misgivings. The problems of Madras and Bombay are all chronicled here; at no moment is there any attempt to play down the dangers of populism. "He who rides the tiger" is a typical example of the challenges facing the country

at that formative stage. Like all great artists, Shankar leaves us wondering whether the solution devised by Nehru and his government was the right one. There is, however, no questioning the good faith.

## **Nehru and Regional Issues**

There were not too many problems between the Centre and the States during the Nehru years. Some of the more amusing dilemmas of Nehru deal with Kashmir, Maharashtra, W Bengal and Punjab. The great political stalwarts of the times. Dr B.C. Roy, Sheikh Abdullah, Srikrishna Sinha, and Ravi Shankar Shukla, stand up to the demands of the Centre, and Nehru educates the country in the need for compromise between the parts and the whole. The special place Pratap Singh Kairon had in Nehru's affections is tartly commented on.

## **Nehru's Three Elections**

The election speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru, the wild words he sowed which reaped so many votes, never ceased to fascinate Shankar. There was also the unending excitement of the peripatetic political educator trying to go to every single constituency in the country. All the excitements of the three elections, India's great experiments in democracy, which surprised the Indians themselves and impressed critics everywhere provided the perfect occasion for Nehru, the persuader, the communicator, and the populist politician.

## **Nehru and the Congress Party**

The Congress Party comes in for some pleasant criticism during the discussions on cooperation, the Hindu Code Bill, and the selection of candidates for the elections. Shankar immortalises the permanent problems of all political leaders in all systems as faced and accepted after some initial reluctance by Nehru. Election after election, the same candidates come back, Shankar notes, the same ministers in spite of the talk of fresh blood.



## **Nehru and the Opposition**

The debates between Nehru and the many points of view ranged against him in the country delight Shankar. Some of his finest cartoons deal with one man's answers to many voices, angry, rasping, and shrill with hopelessness. Kripalani, H.V. Kamath, Rajaji in later years, and Masani form the secular opposition. There are also the angry leftist militants led by Ajay Ghosh, Renu Chakravarty, and A.K. Gopalan. It was a mad exhilarating party.

## **Nehru and India's Neighbours**

Pakistan and, later, China provide the most difficult problems for Nehru's foreign policy. The alternation between hostility and agreement with Pakistan on many issues during the Liaquat and Ayub years comes out clearly. Kashmir is the central issue. With China, the early 1959 cartoon is clairvoyant about Tibet. The later sad years of alienation and conflict are depicted with a certain restraint. At the very end comes the dramatic exhortation to the national will to face aggression, the great new genie from the bottle. Among the other neighbours a powerful cartoon on the inequities of the Rana regime in Nepal in 1950 recalls the challenges of another generation.

## **Nehru and Non-alignment**

The pioneering role of India and Nehru on non-alignment comes out clearly in Shankar's cartoons. In the first cold war, both Stalin and Truman are deeply suspicious of this new animal, non-alignment; in Commonwealth politics also non-alignment comes in. Later in the Nehru years, when non-alignment comes of age, it becomes a less exciting subject for caricature and comment. Foreign statesmen, Eisenhower, Dulles and, of course, Churchill are puzzled and angry. The mathematical apportionment of blame for aggression in Hungary and Suez is brilliantly portrayed by Shankar.

## **Nehru's Foreign Policy**

Jawaharlal Nehru speaking on foreign policy, on the problems of the world, on war and peace, made the ordinary Indian feel a little taller. Shankar loved to depict this magnified image. He was, however, never completely taken in. One of his greatest cartoons picture Nehru as Don Quixote setting out on his happy pilgrimage in search of world peace against all odds. There is also the unavoidable contrast between success abroad and incomplete achievement at home, at least in the eyes of the political commentator, the critic, the cartoonist. Relations between India and the great powers, nuclear disarmament and the politics of aid, all figure in Shankar's cartoons.

## **Nehru and Foreign Aid**

Some of Shankar's most perceptive comments are on the problems faced by the young nation in economic matters. These are bitter and angry sometimes, but reflect the reality of the situation and do not in any way criticise Nehru the leader, or his policies. Little India—Nehru—with its head crushed between the two blocs (Truman and Stalin) offering aid in the late forties, shows how Shankar was always aware of the need to be wary of assistance. Towards the end come the problems of foreign assistance during T.T.K's stewardship of the Finance Ministry. Never for a moment did Nehru, nor his sympathetic commentator, lose sight of the need for safeguarding national integrity when securing foreign assistance.

## **Nehru and Planning**

Even before the Constitution was framed, Plans were the staple of political discussion. Nehru was a committed enthusiast. Shankar has great fun in lampooning the production of paper plans with little relation to reality. Over the years, the first, the second, and the third plan are discussed with sympathy, but with a great deal of scepticism. V.T. Krishnamachari and Gadgil are at the centre of the picture; not the Finance Ministers, John Matthai, Deshmukh or T.T. Krishnamachari.

## **Nehru and the Public/Private Sector**

Some of Shankar's famous cartoons deal with the great debate in the country between the public and the private sector; Indian capitalists like G.D. Birla are educated by the fabian socialists. Foreigners look on our experiment with scant sympathy, from both edges of the cold war chasm. Jawaharlal Nehru himself is romantically convinced that the public sector is superior

## **Nehru's Visits Abroad**

Nehru's visits to China and the several Commonwealth Conferences provide Shankar with excellent raw material. Before Belgrade, he hopes to meet and influence both Kennedy and Khrushchev. He calls on an embarrassed Churchill, and attends many Commonwealth Conferences. He always returns after successful diplomacy to problems and turmoil at home. To some Indians, there was something unreal about India's hyperactivism in external relations. Shankar did not share this, but never hesitated to include it in his comments.

## **Nehru—Many Men in One**

Shankar's greatest cartoons on Nehru deal with the pushes and pulls of a complex human personality caught in the maelstrom of politics during a period of dramatic change; he loves to show the many aspects of Nehru as different individuals, the angry Nehru pulled back by the staid, sober

part of his personality. Some cartoons are crowded with the Nehru picture facing different problems in different poses. In a word, Shankar succeeds in depicting this political leader as comprehending all aspects of a large and diverse nation. This extends to his foreign policy attitudes also. The dilemmas of decision-making faced by a genuinely-concerned intellectual fired with a vision but fettered by realities come through with dramatic clarity. These multi-Nehru cartoons transcend their original medium and become great art.

## **Who after Nehru?**

Some of Shankar's most charming cartoons deal with Nehru's retirement plans announced from 1954 onwards and rather easily given up on the persuasion of his friends. He enjoys picturing the unconcealed hopes and excitement of his many heir-presumptives. There was no heir-apparent. Towards the very end comes the Kamaraj plan. Krishna Menon, Morarji Desai and towards the end Lal Bahadur Shastri figure in the list. It is an interesting enough topic for Shankar but certainly not an obsession as it was to political analysts outside the country. However, hasn't Shankar predicted with uncanny precision the shape of things to come in his cartoon that appeared just ten days before Nehru's passing away?



## His Last One on Nehru



After the passing away of Jawaharlal Nehru on May 27, 1964, Shankar had occasion to draw another cartoon on him only once. Perhaps he could not forget Panditji when he was drawing for the very next Independence Day number of the *Weekly*. The cover of the August 16 issue recalls how Nehru had fondly watched the growing nation—depicted as a little girl—and how the now grown-up maiden is forlorn and overcome with grief in his absence.



# Twenty-five years later

Ailing since the beginning of 1988, Shankar was asked by his children, on Diwali day, whether he could attempt a cartoon—any cartoon. A pad was propped up for him, the hand was shaky as it held a felt pen. He looked up, nobody prompted any name or a theme. He drew a caricature. It resembled Nehru. He appeared not quite happy with his effort. The page was turned. He drew another figure. Nehru. Another page and another caricature. Nehru again. He smiled. He drew yet another figure. None else than Nehru. Another page, and one more caricature of Nehru took shape. The pen slowly dropped from his hands.

Two of the five figures he drew have a lot of similarity with the cartoons he was making during his heyday.

Will Nehru ever fade out from his memory?

